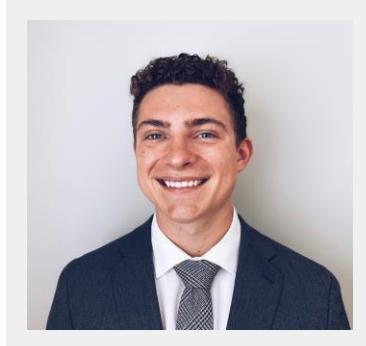


Summer 2021 EJA Fellow:



Name: Christian Beveridge

Law School: University of Chicago

Organization: Legal Aid Chicago

Update 1:

In two short weeks at Legal Aid Chicago, I've already learned and experienced so much. Working in the Consumer Practice Group, I've been able to hear clients' stories about a variety of problems ranging from predatory lending, consumer fraud, unfair debt collection, bankruptcy, and more. Listening to these stories has underscored the importance of free civil legal aid. No one has the right to an attorney in these situations, yet these problems are legally complex and require professional advice. Organizations like Equal Justice America and Legal Aid Chicago fight to provide free civil legal aid to clients just like mine. Their work ensures that someone's lack of resources doesn't prevent them from protecting their legal rights.

I am proud of the work I've been a part of so far and am looking forward to what the rest of the summer brings.

Update 2:

Four weeks into my time at Legal Aid Chicago, I am gaining such an appreciation for the impact that smart government policies can have on people's lives.

In particular, I have been able to see the impact of Chicago's Fresh Start Program on several clients. The program allows people who are in/have completed their bankruptcy proceedings to enter into a payment plan for all tickets incurred in the last 3 years and waive all older tickets. Such a simple program can, and does, provide many Chicagoans tremendous relief. Just yesterday, I had the pleasure of hearing a man overjoyed to learn of a clear path out of debt that had been weighing on him for years.

Experiences like this underscore the importance of free civil legal services. Many of our clients have understandably never heard of programs like this, but thanks to free access to legal services, they can learn of such life-changing solutions.



Update 3: One great feature of Legal Aid Chicago's work is its Bankruptcy Help Desk. At the Help Desk, we help Pro Se clients in their Bankruptcy cases.

One great thing the Help Desk does is help draft motions to reopen bankruptcy cases for clients. Often our clients have done 99% of the heavy lifting to get their desired discharge, but one (often obscure) legal roadblock prevents them from obtaining it. The Help Desk will help clients draft all of the required paperwork, which almost always results in clients achieving their discharge shortly after.

It is incredibly gratifying to work on these cases. Often, clients will have gone years with their case terminated, not knowing why they didn't achieve the discharge they were promised. By helping draft these motions, the Help Desk can truly make huge differences in clients' lives. Just today, I saw one of these motions help a client get her discharge so that she was able to purchase a new home.

This is just another example of the importance of providing free civil legal services. Filing for bankruptcy can be an incredibly complicated, frustrating process; no one should have to do it alone.

Entry 4: As my time at Legal Aid Chicago comes to a close, I'm truly grateful for both the professional and personal experience I've gained this summer.

On a professional level, this was my first legal job. It was amazing to translate the skills I learned in my first year in law school to actually helping clients. I was able to write motions, attend hearings, negotiate with opposing counsel and more. To have such substantive experience at such an early stage was incredibly valuable.

More importantly though, the personal experience of interacting with both clients and their attorneys was eye opening for me. Hearing stories about people's problems as well as their attorneys' experience in solving those problems gave me knowledge I could never get from a textbook

It has been an amazing summer and I have loved my time at Legal Aid Chicago. I feel much more prepared and experienced going into my 2L year at University of Chicago Law School.

Thanks again to Equal Justice America for the chance to learn these valuable lessons.